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ABSTRACT

This paper is the first in a series on family day care produced as part of a project to design and test an informal continuing education program with family day care mothers. The initial impetus for discussion of day care problems in Tompkins County, New York, grew out of the concern of professionals from counseling agencies. Investigation and discussions revealed that there was no central agency that could provide information about day care. Finally, a Gathering Place was established to help implement the concept of centralized support services. It served several purposes. It provided a central place for at-cost sales of arts, crafts and snack supplies to cooperative nursery schools, day care centers, play schools and family day care mothers. A major goal of the Day Care Service is to develop a comprehensive network of good day care services for children of working parents. The service has moved a long way. Twenty-five percent of the children in Tompkins County are in organized day care facilities as opposed to ten percent in the nation. It is being called on to share its ideas and accomplishments with many other areas of the state. The approaches used by the Day Care Service to involve the day care mothers and to develop their self-image were as follows: to involve them in the planning for training programs and workshops at the Gathering Place and to encourage and work with them in developing an autonomous organization that provides an opportunity for day care mothers to share common problems. (CK)

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THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF THE TOMPKINS COUNTY DAY CARE AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL INC.*

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THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF THE TOMPKINS COUNTY DAY CARE AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL INC.

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2

F 2987

THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF THE TOMPKINS COUNTY DAY CARE AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL INC.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Interest in Day Care

II. An Exploratory Year

III. The Challenge of Licensing

IV. The Beginning of the Tompkins County Day Care Service

V. Tompkins County Day Care Service Undergoes Significant Changes

VI. A Second Beginning
. The Gathering Place

VII. Planning and Coordinating Child Care Services in a Community Context

VIII. Toward a Community of Family Day Care Mothers
. Obstacles
. First Steps
. Training Program Planned, Implemented and Evaluated
. Family Day Care Mothers' Association Formed

IX. A Growing and Changing Community Agency

F 2987

I. INTEREST IN DAY CARE

The initial impetus for discussion of day care problems in Tompkins County grew out of the concern of professionals from counseling agencies, such as the Family and Children's Service, school psychologists, school nurses and other agencies serving families. Early in 1964, the Counseling Section of the Tompkins County Social Planning Council, whose members consisted of agencies or persons concerned with families and children, began to discuss the need for good day care for referral purposes. It was discovered that many children were shifted from babysitter to babysitter (sometimes as many as 22 changes before the child was ready to enter kindergarten). Often the fact that children were in less than adequate care arrangements was not the fault of the mothers, who had to work to help support their families and had nowhere else to turn. These mothers usually made the best provisions they could, given their economic situations and the availability of day care facilities.

A question arose: what day care facilities existed in Tompkins County? In 1965, with funds from the Tompkins County Foundation (a small private agency), Sandra Lyons, a trained social worker, agreed to do a survey for the Social Planning Council. At that time there was only one nonprofit group day care center (Ithaca Nursery) for 45 children, and it employed a sliding fee scale. It had been in existence since the 1930s and had used various public funds for group care. There were two or three proprietary play schools and day nurseries and six state-licensed family day care facilities. As in other counties of New York State, it appears that most of the day care in Tompkins County was provided by unlicensed family day care homes.

The first support for family day care came in 1967 from Title IV-A moneys. This type of day care was the most accessible, inexpensive and most often selected by parents. In addition, the state's long history of in-fighting among the departments responsible for group day care made it politically expedient to concentrate on family day care at this point in time.

II. AN EXPLORATORY YEAR

Investigation and discussions of the Counseling Section of the Tompkins County Social Planning Council revealed there was no central agency that could provide information about day care. At about this time, the need for a central place to get information was discussed in a master's thesis on working mothers by Ellen Lipton. Therefore, the Social Planning Council set up a Day Care Committee. In fall 1966, with funds (voted on an experimental basis) from the United Fund, a part-time person was employed to explore further the need for additional day care services in the community.

June Rogers was hired to interpret what day care is and what the needs are of the working mother, the child and the caretaker involved in day care. She spoke with church groups, social workers, school psychologists, plant nurses, unions and anyone who had a role or interest in day care. Ms. Rogers found that the prevailing attitudes toward day care were marked with disdain and that day care was reluctantly accepted as a service for those poor, working mothers who could not provide anything better for their children. One exception was the excellent all-day nursery school (mentioned earlier) that not only had provided developmental care for some 45 children of working parents but also had set an early precedent for quality day care, at least in the middle-class community. Experience with this nursery school led to the acceptance of day care as a realistic and desirable alternative for the mother who needed or wanted to work.

During this exploratory year, the need was further defined not only for a central resource center to provide parents with information and referral to available facilities but also for the development of new programs at every age level.

III. THE CHALLENGE OF LICENSING

Originally the licensing of day care facilities was handled by the State Department in Syracuse. Through the survey conducted by Sandra Lyons, it was learned that the attitude toward licensing was defensive, that licensing required a lot of paperwork and that it was a general hindrance to establishing good day care facilities and a positive community attitude. The Day Care Committee decided that inadequate staff at the area office level was part of the central problem. If more and better family day care was to be recruited and developed, and if support and training were to be made available as needed to the day care mothers, then local authority to license would have to be sought.

During 1966 and 1967, negotiations with the State Department in Syracuse took place. It was a combined effort of several community agencies including the Department of Social Services. The Department in Syracuse argued that to delegate the authority to license would mean a lowering of standards generally. Finally, however, the Department in Syracuse agreed that the Child Welfare Division of the Tompkins County Department of Social Services as a part of the Day Care Service could develop a family day care program to include recruitment, licensing and supervision of family day care homes.

At the end of that year, a report and budget were completed and sent to the local Health Commissioner, the Superintendent of Schools, the Superintendent of BOCES and the Commissioner of Social Services. The budget called for a part-time trained social worker, a half-time coordinator who

would interpret and plan for day care services and a half-time secretary. The Day Care Committee felt a trained social worker would be necessary to assure sensitive and skilled support to the licensed day care mothers and the working parents. The Commissioner of Social Services agreed to fund half the budget if the United Fund would supply the other half.

IV. THE BEGINNING OF THE TOMPKINS COUNTY DAY CARE SERVICE

Thus, in fall 1967, the Tompkins County Day Care Service was established. The Service laid the groundwork for understanding and support of a community network of quality day care services, local recruitment and licensing of family day care homes. It continued to work for the expansion and development of new day care programs and for a central referral and planning office. The major thrust in the agency's first year of operation was the recruitment and licensing of family day care homes. The Tompkins County Day Care Service licensed eight family day care homes during its first year of existence.

V. TOMPKINS COUNTY DAY CARE SERVICE UNDERGOES SIGNIFICANT CHANGES

In 1968 and 1969, Beverly Schmidt took the place of June Rogers as the half-time coordinator; Joanne Ivry continued as the trained social worker paid by the Department of Social Services until May of 1969. During these two years, several things happened. A Board of Directors, including working mothers and family day care mothers, was established; there was an expansion of group day care facilities in Tompkins County (including the Groton Child Development Center, the IACC [Ithaca Area Council of Churches] Day Care Center, a Head Start Center in Lansing, a nursery school in Newfield); and many new family day care homes became available to meet the needs of an ever-increasing number of working mothers.

However, despite this progress, things began to look bleak for the agency. In October 1968, the Department of Social Services became unhappy with a situation which housed one employee outside of their jurisdiction. In order to preserve the agency as a total community service, the Tompkins County Day Care Service moved into the Social Services office complex. Gradually, however, the community aspect of the Day Care Service faded. Increasingly, the Day Care Board had to deal with internal problems within the Department related to the family day care program. Within one year, the Commissioner of Social Services began replacing staff without reference to the Personnel Committee of the Day Care Board. (For example, no trained social workers were employed after this time, thus lowering the quality of the staffing arrangement.) The decisions concerning recruitment and licensing of family day care were made more and more unilaterally by the Department of Social Services.

Concurrently with these developments, problems began to arise in New York City as to where the Welfare Rights Organization should be housed. It was decided that this organization should not share the same quarters as the Department of Social Services. The State then searched to see if any such community agencies were housed in Department of Social Services and found that in Tompkins County the Tompkins County Day Care Coordinator had her office in the Department of Social Services. She subsequently was asked to leave the offices of the County Department, and this marked the end of a rather unsuccessful public-private funding of a community agency.

VI. A SECOND BEGINNING

The Tompkins County Day Care Service moved out of the Department of Social Services, regained its name and established a separate location and its original phone number. The recruitment and licensing of family day care homes remained an exclusive function of the Department of Social Services, known as the Family Day Care Unit of the Division of Child Welfare. The Tompkins County Day Care Service agreed not to refer individuals directly to licensed family day care providers but to send only those needing family home care to the Family Day Care Unit office.

June Rogers returned to the position of coordinator of Tompkins County Day Care Services, May 1, 1970. By this time, it was necessary that the Service redevelop and expand the community aspects that had gradually diminished during its two-year stay in the Social Services Department. Several things were done immediately to establish direct service and to regain visibility in the community. Laurel Hodgden of the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, New York State College of Human Ecology, Cornell University, had worked with the Day Care Committee and had repeatedly urged the development of centralized activities and support services related to early childhood programs. The Tompkins County Day Care Service, therefore, within weeks initiated a centralized referral and information service for working parents and other parents seeking child development experiences for their children. The Service kept track of openings in group day care and nursery schools, a listing of available in-home sitters and unlicensed family day care facilities. In addition, a job application service was established for use by all early childhood programs with vacancies and those people looking for employment in the child care field. This meant that applications were available to all programs as openings arose, assuring that applicants would not have to apply to all programs separately and that directors would not have to interview persons unsuited to their programs.

The Gathering Place

In February 1971, the Gathering Place began as a further implementation of the concept of centralized support services. It was initiated by the Day Care Service with the help of Sue McCord (Department of Human Development and Family Studies, New York State College of Human Ecology,

Cornell University), a group of day care mothers, nursery school staff and day care center staff. From its inception, the Gathering Place was aided by dedicated volunteers (including professional consultants), without whose regular support this service could not have existed. In particular, students of the Board of Cooperative Educational Services Child Care Services class were a tremendous help to the Gathering Place in preparing exhibits, displays and bulletin boards.

The Gathering Place served several purposes. First, it provided a central place for at-cost sales of arts, crafts and snack supplies to cooperative nursery schools, day care centers, play schools and family day care mothers, licensed and unlicensed. Second, the Gathering Place was attractively decorated with equipment made from materials easily available and often discarded at home and so served as a model for inexpensive early childhood environments. Each month a different array of trash-to-treasure suggestions for educational play and activities for youngsters was displayed on the open shelves. The nursery school operators immediately recognized the Gathering Place as a resource where they chould obtain real savings and get some new ideas. However, the day care mothers were slower to respond to the Gathering Place.

Even more important, the Gathering Place was conceived as a spot where all kinds of caretakers and other individuals interested in children could come together on an equal basis to share ideas and to learn from each other. From the beginning, day care mothers were appointed to the steering committee of the Gathering Place, and yet they were slow to get involved. As the day care mothers became more familiar and more confident, they were able to admit they were overwhelmed by the art productions that the nursery schools provided the Gathering Place. The day care mothers needed to know that they could make a definite contribution.

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At Gathering Place meetings, the day care staff from various programs in the community presented projects with the children as models of interaction between teacher and child. The day care mothers, too, began to participate and share information by demonstrating snack food ideas and activities. Handouts of the snack ideas devised by the day care mothers were printed and distributed. Gradually the day care mothers began to feel that they, too, were an integral part of the Gathering Place.

The Gathering Place has proved to be a valuable and broadly used service and has facilitated significant interaction between center staff and day care mothers. It is clear that the Gathering Place, like any other social service, cannot be successful unless it meets the felt and expressed needs of the people for whom the service is intended. Therefore, those people should take an active part in directing the service and making known their requests for additional programs.

VII. PLANNING AND COORDINATING CHILD CARE SERVICES IN A COMMUNITY CONTEXT

From the beginning, a major goal of the Day Care Service has been to develop a comprehensive network of good day care services for children of working parents. This means, of course, that a primary task is planning for these services and coordinating both the child care programs and resources available to them.

The original composition of the Day Care Committee is a good example of this early emphasis. The Committee included representatives from the Department of Social Services, the Social Planning Council (United Fund), Family and Children's Service and the St. John's Nursery School. The efforts of the coordinator have always been directed toward:

- interpreting the need for day care services
- assisting groups and persons desirous of providing these services
- providing options among quality child care alternatives to families and children needing child care
- developing a supporting network of services to child care providers and parents

One of the initial concerns that led to the establishment of the Day Care Service was the fear that agencies would act unilaterally or competitively in the community. It has been a major goal of the Day Care Service to act as a catalyst in bringing together and encouraging cooperation among individuals and agencies concerned with child care for the improvement and expansion of day care facilities in the county. The hoped for cooperation and sharing among child care services is now beginning to operate at all levels of preschool programs.

One example of this multilateral effort to develop a support network is some of the work done by Cooperative Extension. Extension has been involved with the Day Care Service almost from its inception. Specifically, the first joint effort was on the part of Virginia Ahrens, an extension home economist who was interested in nutrition ideas for child care workers in the community. June Rogers, Coordinator of the Day Care Service, suggested that she work with one family day care mother to test menus. She wanted to know whether they were economical, whether they could be prepared easily enough to fit into the busy schedule of a day care mother, and whether the children liked the food. These menus, developed five or six years ago, are presently being distributed by the Family Day Care Unit of the Division of Child Welfare in the Department of Social Services.

The work of Cooperative Extension agent Ann Mathews is a good example of how existing resources of Cooperative Extension are being utilized. She has background in early childhood education and a tremendous interest in child care services. Ms. Mathews provided a number of resources, in particular, parent education programs and assistance in training for family day care mothers, in cooperation with the Department of Social Services and the Day Care Service. She also helped in the development of parent groups at Northside House, organized various workshops and demonstrations for the Gathering Place and is presently a member of the Board of the Day Care Service.

A second example of the cooperation and coordination of agency activity in the child care area has been with the public schools. Over the years, the public school system has established a number of preschool programs, the first being the St. John's Nursery School. During the War on Poverty and through the efforts of the State Department of Education, pre-kindergarten programs have been developed and, along with a Head Start program included in the Ithaca Nursery Program.

The child care interests of the public schools have not been set in a community context traditionally. Public schools tended to work unilaterally with very little concern for the way in which other child care programs were affected by their decisions. With the availability of Title IV-A funds to preschool programs in the public schools under contractual arrangement between the school system and the Department of Social Services, the schools entered into a closer relationship with community agencies. Because the Department of Social Services has always dealt with the Day Care Service with regard to child care concerns, the Day Care Service was called upon to help. A small Day Care Committee has served the community by making recommendations concerning funding of particular nursery school programs and recruitment for personnel concerned with the Ithaca Nursery Program (under the administration of public schools since the 1930s).

A third way in which the Day Care Service has functioned to develop and expand the support network for child care providers has been with the library service. The Social Responsibility Roundtable, a group of librarians, was interested in reaching young children who were not getting library service. Representatives from the Cornell Nursery School, the Day Care Service, the Finger Lakes Library System, the Tompkins County Library, the Friends of the Library (a citizens' fund-raising group for the library) and the Social Responsibility Roundtable, the Department of Social Services met to talk about expanding and improving library service available to child care providers.

A proposal was developed that requested the Friends of the Library to donate five hundred dollars in order to buy paperback books for young

children to be delivered in at least two ways: (1) in packets to be delivered monthly on an experimental basis to family day care homes through the Department of Social Services family day care caseworkers, and (2) through distribution at the Gathering Place.

The experimental period is now over, and the Department of Social Services feels that it does not have the time to continue this service. However, because the five day care mothers who received these experimental packets of ten books (for various ages of children) were so appreciative of the service and because more family day care mothers requested this book service, the Friends of the Library plan to recruit volunteers to regularly deliver books to day care homes. This effort prompted two students from Cornell to develop a list of library services for young children. This is another example of utilizing existing resources and focusing them in support of the needs of young children and caretakers in the community.

VIII. TOWARD A COMMUNITY OF FAMILY DAY CARE MOTHERS

The objective of the Tompkins County Day Care Committee, and later the Day Care Service, was not only to provide resources for those persons caring for children but also to improve the quality of care offered by those persons. The original emphasis on the child has shifted to include a focus on and concern for the caretaker as evidenced when the caseworkers for the Family Day Care Unit of the Department of Social Services, June Rogers of the Day Care Service and Ann Mathews of Cooperative Extension met together to evaluate the training program that had traditionally been offered to family day care mothers by the Department of Social Services. (This meeting took place at the request of the Department of Social Services.)

Obstacles

One of the first attempts to include family day care mothers occurred when the Day Care Service and others involved insisted that the Family Day Care Unit include day care mothers in any planning for training. It was clear that some obstacles to involvement of the day care mothers in training were their feelings of unworthiness, their own lack of recognition of the function that they were serving and lack of recognition by the community of the value of service family day care mothers were providing to families. It was decided that until a positive self-image on the part of the day care mothers could be established, it was useless to discuss plans for more and better training programs. This group agreed that persons who feel good about themselves and who believe they are performing a useful role generally seek help and are interested in improving themselves.

How could the self-image of women who are caring for children be improved? It was suggested that through the resources of the Gathering Place some social get-togethers could be arranged. An evening program was planned.

In addition, a dinner was proposed to honor family day care mothers with testimonials from groups and individuals concerned with the improvement of community day care facilities. The testimonials would state the importance of day care to the community. It was hoped that these two social functions would have some significant influence on the day care mothers' realization of their own worth, awareness of the importance of their role as providers of a community service and would stimulate their desire to share ideas and problems with other day care mothers.

First Steps

In April 1971, the Gathering Place sponsored an evening dessert and workshop for women who cared for children in their homes. Delicious desserts were donated, and a workshop on outdoor play was led by Sue McCord. As Mrs. McCord described ways that simple, natural elements could be used in outdoor play for children, the day care mothers also contributed valuable suggestions and ideas. The evening furthered the involvement of day care mothers in improving day care facilities.

The other social function was the day care mothers' dinner. There was concern about the financial support for such a gathering. The Board of Cooperative Educational Services food staff agreed to provide a fancy buffet for only two dollars per person. Various people in the community interested in day care were invited and asked to pay for themselves and another person, a day care mother. In addition, several people made small donations. It was hoped that corsages could be provided for the day care mothers, but there was too little money available. Therefore, buttons were ordered that had "Day Care Now" written on them, and small flowers were made of yellow and green felt. The buttons served as the centers of the hand-made corsages for the day care mothers. There was no head table, and the name tags were randomly placed so that agency people, concerned citizens and day care mothers all sat together.

The evening dessert and the dinner provided opportunities for day care mothers to get together. They discovered that they had common problems and could share them via telephone. Previously, the Department of Social Services interacted with the day care mothers individually, not collectively. The two social functions also aided in the development of a constituency that could elect its own representatives to the Day Care Service Board and other agencies concerned with child care, and that could speak on behalf of a group of day care mothers about their concerns and needs.

Training Program Planned, Implemented and Evaluated

A group of day care mothers, established after the dinner in June 1971, met the following September to help plan the training program for new day care mothers sponsored by the Department of Social Services. This group

discussed its ideas with representatives from the Department of Social Services, Cooperative Extension and the Day Care Service. For example, they said the existing training program had valuable content but was too spread out (it was given over a ten-week period), and parts were not interesting to some day care mothers. In addition, the day care mothers urged a program with more participation and less lecture.

This group decided to set up a training program taking place on two Saturdays that could be mostly action with some films and discussion. For instance, in the area of nutrition, the day care mothers actually prepared a meal, set tables and ate together. The women also made musical instruments and participated in various activities rather than merely observing. Hopefully, the Department of Social Services will continue this program and will draw on the resources of Cooperative Extension, the Day Care Service and the Montessori Day Care Education Project. It is also hoped the Department will provide an orientation program for new family day care mothers, a variety of minicourses and additional workshops during the year for staff in group care programs (many already existing). For example,

- workshops at the Gathering Place
- Montessori lectures and workshops
- substitutes to go into day care homes of all experienced day care mothers and to go into new day care homes to share ideas and concerns
- courses in Human Services (one day care mother is now enrolled in a course for paraprofessionals at the Community College).

As day care mothers become involved and comfortable in a nondidactic, relaxed atmosphere, they share their needs. These needs are not necessarily what professionals think they need, but what they actually need and want. For example, a first-aid workshop was sponsored by the Gathering Place because of the need expressed by family day care mothers.

Family Day Care Mothers' Association Formed

As a consequence of these opportunities that brought family day care mothers together, a Family Day Care Mothers' Association has formed. The volunteer from the Day Care Service who served as adviser to the day care mothers in developing the Tompkins County Family Day Care Mothers' Association found that their first concern was money. [This is obvious because if people feel that they are performing an important function, they want to be paid for it.] The Day Care Mothers' Association negotiated with the Department of Social Services in hope that they would receive regular pay for holidays and occasional sick days. They also argued for a pay increase that barely gives them a profit, considering the expenses involved in providing child care in a home. The raise was granted. It included payment for holidays but not for sick days.

The Family Day Care Mothers' Association not only defines needs, but also reflects a constituency that can participate with other groups in child care activities and concerns of early childhood programs. For example, the Day Care Mothers' Association was invited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children to participate in the arts and crafts fair that involved all nursery schools and day care centers. The day care mothers sponsored a booth on snack foods. The experience gave them a chance to feel equal to other child care providers, to feel a sense of importance and a sense of belonging in the community of caretakers and teachers.

In summary, the approaches used by the Day Care Service to involve the day care mothers and to develop their self-image were as follows: to involve them in the planning for training programs and workshops at the Gathering Place; to hold a dinner honoring them in terms of the community; and to encourage and to work with them in developing an autonomous organization that provides an opportunity for day care mothers to share common problems and that also functions as their united voice to the county and to the Department of Social Services.

IX. A GROWING AND CHANGING COMMUNITY AGENCY

The Day Care Service has moved a long way. Twenty-five percent of the children in Tompkins County are in organized day care facilities as opposed to ten percent in the nation. The Day Care Service is being called on to share its ideas and accomplishments with many other areas of the state. Yet the Day Care Service is painfully aware of the many gaps in service in its own community including before- and after-school care, care for children of all ages whose parents work on shifts (factories and hospital) and for children in the rural areas (notable exception - Groton).

As the Day Care Service is called on increasingly to find adequate facilities for the children of working mothers from birth to fourteen years of age, it is hoped that an effort to work with other coordinating groups in the state will be successful in amending the State Plan to allow use of Title IV-A funds for coordinating and planning purposes. If these or other funds become available, the Day Care Service plans to move quickly to implement a proposal to expand the resources of the central office and the Gathering Place and to carry them in appropriate ways into the rural communities with the help of parents and care providers in the townships.

Whether or not funding is realized, the Day Care Service will continue to work closely with the Department of Social Services and other family-serving agencies to focus their resources, where possible, on child care needs and concerns.

F 2987

In fact, as a reflection of the Day Care Service's continuously growing commitment to meet the varied needs of children and families more effectively, the Day Care Service in June of 1972 became incorporated as the Tompkins County Day Care and Child Development Council Inc. The Day Care Council will continue to coordinate and offer assistance to the enlarging supportive network of child care services. It will also continue to be responsive to the felt and expressed needs of the caretakers and programs for young children, to foster the development of new services to meet these needs, to improve the quality of child care generally, and to expand the involvement of families using services in the decisions about services.